

Africa west of Smith, C.F. 243



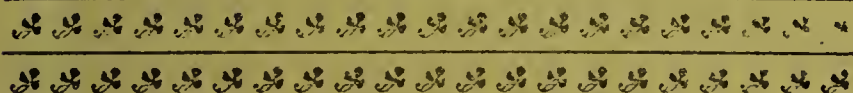
Nigeria
Our . . .

African Mission.

**Country, Climate, Manners and Customs of
the People—Their Religious Needs.**

By Rev. C. E. Smith.

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Our African Mission.

COUNTRY.

The work of the Southern Baptist Convention in Africa is in the Yoruba country, which is situated in West Africa, within the lower bend of the Niger river, and between 3 degrees and 5 degrees east longitude, and lies just above the sixth parallel of north latitude, and is about three-fourth the size of Arkansas. Along the coast it is flat, and there are many swamps, and it is heavily timbered, but gradually rises until on the northern boundary it rises to about 1,400 feet above sea level, with hills rising several hundred feet higher. On the whole, the country is high and dry, and in the interior is prairie, with strips of timber along the streams, and scattering stunted growths among the grass. The grass grows from six to twelve feet high. There are many hills rising three hundred to five hundred feet above the plain, but scarcely forming ranges for more than a few miles. Except near the towns no stock is fed on the grass, and no use is made of it, except to roof houses. It is burned off annually. Game is not very plentiful now, though many kinds are to be found, but none harmful except

the leopard, and I never hear of people's being attacked by it.

CLIMATE.

Being near the equator, the climate is always warm, and the sun heat is most dangerous to white men, though in the shade it is not so intolerably hot as might be supposed. The thermometer ranges from 70 to 95 degrees in the shade, with an occasional drop to 60 degrees in the early morning. I have suffered more from the extreme heat of our American summers than I ever have here. But here there is little let up. It is very unhealthy for white men, and there is little or no abatement in the high death rate. Part of this is due no doubt to bad habits and carelessness, but with the best of care and habits one cannot be perfectly well, and many cannot live here at all. It is not safe for white men to remain here more than three years as a rule, and none but missionaries stay more than a year or eighteen months, and I believe none but our own missionaries stay as long as three years now. I do not include the Catholics, who, I believe, make long stays. The seasons are the rainy, from April to November, and the dry, the rest of the year.

PEOPLE.

The people are pure negroes, and this is almost sufficient to say to southern people. In common with the American negro, they are full

of superstition, and have the same good-natured indifference to the realities of life. But in his native land the negro seems to be more natural, because he does not imitate the white man, except in the coast towns. The houses are built, the walls of dried clay and the roofs of sticks and long grass. The rooms are about eight or ten feet square, and seven feet high, and all open into a common piazza, which in turn opens into an open court. Many families live in one house, each adult having his own room. All the domestic animals have full access to the piazza and court.

For the most part the people live in towns and villages, and not on their farms. Some of these towns are very large. Besides farming, which is general, nearly all the trades are carried on in a crude fashion. There is also a great deal of buying and selling. Work animals are not used at all, but farming is done with a short-handle hoe, and all goods and produce is carried on the head. Women never work the farms, but they help to gather the crop and carry it home. Horses are used only for riding, and then not for travelling on a journey except by the "big men" and chiefs.

FAMILY LIFE, MARRIAGE AND FUNERALS.

There is family life, but no privacy as with us. The marriage relation is recognized as sacred, but separations are very frequent.

Usually girls are engaged when they are children, and have no say as to whom they shall marry. The man or his family pay a dowery to the family of the girl, ranging from about \$15 to \$25. The marriage ceremony consists in a feast of several days, the girl being taken to her husband's house by her family on the morning after the night that the feast begins. The bride stops in a room until the feast is over, and is not supposed to see any one except her own husband and her women friends. In most places there is a marriage season of the year, when all, who are going to that year, get married. During the whole feast, the drummers are busy making as much noise as possible. Wedding processions, singing wedding songs as they go, are common. Polygamy is common. Relatives never marry.

Funerals are so much like weddings as to make it difficult at times to know which it is. The deceased is buried almost immediately in a grave dug in the piazza, the body being wrapped in cloths and mats. The rest consists in crowds of peoples going through the streets beating drums, singing the praises of the deceased, firing guns, swinging black horse tails, dancing, and in the house feasting night and day for several days, in connection with which there is a constant beating of drums. All this is supposed to be done to honor the dead, but I fear it is their own stomachs they are honor-

ing, or rather dishonoring. Little children dying are thrown out or buried in any convenient place outside the wall, with no honors of any sort.

PARENTS.

In a conventional way parents are always honored by the children, and elders by the younger, and in outward form, both of act and word, great respect is shown them. But it is painful to see how many old people there are who have to work till they drop into the grave, and suffer for the necessities of life because their children neglect them. And these same children will spend all they have and go in debt and pawn their children, and even themselves, to honor the abused parent, when dead, with a big funeral. The parents seem very affectionate toward their children, and yet they often pawn them into temporary slavery, and in not a few cases this becomes permanent slavery.

SLAVERY.

Domestic slavery is common, and a very large portion of the population are slaves. What is known as the slave trade is much less prevalent than formerly, and is dying out, as indeed is all slavery, for though the English Government does not interfere with domestic slavery, except in Lagos and immediately surrounding country, yet that free territory makes it too

easy for slaves to escape for slavery to be a paying business. The slave trade is forbidden in the whole territory, and government officers are not allowed to assist in the restoration of slaves.

RELATIONSHIP.

Relationships, at least so far as the words used indicate, seem to me very indefinite; indeed, on account of polygamy and the indefiniteness of terms used, it is often very difficult to find out what a person's relation is. Two terms mostly cover the whole question—namely, elder relative and younger relative—and no matter how near or distant the relation is, these terms are used. To make it more definite many words must be used to show just what the relation is. Even the term father may indicate no more than an uncle.

MORALS.

In a way the people may be said to be fairly moral, at least their morals are not so bad as one might expect, and yet adultery is fearfully common. It is recognized as a crime in the law, and is punished with a fine, but there is no thought of sin or shame in connection with it. Where polygamy is common illegitimate children are not known as such. In the thought of the people, and in the sight of the law, adultery is possible only with a married or an engaged woman. An unengaged girl is simply

spoken of as the wife of the man with whom she has been guilty.

There is simply no such thing as modesty either in word or act. Clothing is very scant, children go without it, and all actions and all language of every kind are public.

GOVERNMENT.

The government is in the hands of principal chiefs, one in each place, with an advisory council, and in large places there are chiefs over the various parts of the town. There is a king of the whole Yoruba country (that is, the tribe known as Yoruba), located in the city of Awyaw, but he has little power outside of his own town. Each town is governed by its own chiefs, and the smaller towns owe allegiance to the larger ones. At present the English Government really governs the country through the native chiefs, who are held responsible to the English officers.

There are well-established laws to which the chiefs must adhere in the government of the people, but in deciding cases between man and man it is largely a matter of which can pay the most money. There are a number of tribes speaking the Yoruba language, and I include all these in the Yoruba country, although they are separate governments, sometimes containing many cities, and sometimes only one with smaller towns. It is estimated that the whole country has a population of about four million.

but no one knows. When a chief dies there is always a line of eligible persons from whom to choose, and the matter is settled by the Council of Chiefs, or in the case of a smaller chief, by the principal chief with the approval of his council.

RELIGION.

The religion of the people is idolatry and fetichism. It is exceedingly difficult to find out anything about their religious belief, partly because they will not tell a stranger anything, and partly because there is so little that is definite. I have asked about a little idol house, what idol it was for, and was answered that it was a place for the children to play, and only after a lot of talking could I get the facts. The priests of the various idols are supposed to have valuable secrets, and to be able to communicate with the spirit of the idol on behalf or against any given person. It is not supposed that the image is the real idol, but that the spirit of the god is in it. Thus the twin god, when one of a pair of twins dies an image is made and worshipped, the worshippers believing that the spirit of the child is in the image, and can help them. The religion has no reference to a future life, but only to this, and the worship, consisting of sacrifices, feasts, bowings, and payments to the priests and to owners of images, is either for the purpose of getting good from the gods or preventing them from doing harm.

Thus an image of the devil is worshipped to prevent him from harming the worshiper. The people believe in one supreme God, whom they call Olorum, which means the owner of heaven. They seem to believe that he created all things, including their gods, but has left matters in the hands of the idols. They believe in immortality, and in a future, good and bad, but no one thinks he is going to the bad. They are perfectly indifferent to the future state, seeming to think it will be all right with them. The spirits of the dead come back to their homes, sometimes for mischief, and so have to be appeased in the worship of certain idols. They have gods many, but images are not very plentiful, and many have no image at all. Persons may be seen on the streets with an image of a god, often the devil, to receive offerings of money from the people passing to appease said god.

LANGUAGE.

The language is one not to be despised at all. It is a musical, pleasing language, and is very full for ordinary purposes, and it is really wonderful how few difficulties in translation there are. Difficulties there are, but in my reading about other languages I should say much less than in many others, even Chinese or Japanese. It is a language of inflections of the voice, by which words spelled alike, and to our ear pronounced alike, have different meanings. Thus

one can say husband, boat, or hoe with the same word; fear, load, or slave with the same word; the devil or the insect locust with the same word, all depending on the inflection of the voice. It is a difficult language to learn to speak so as to be understood, and Europeans never fully master it, no matter how long they may use it.

OUR WORK.

We have at present four main stations in four of the principal cities, and including a new work just starting, four out-stations in villages outside of these chief cities, beside out-station work being done within these cities.

Lagos, though not the largest, is the chief mercantile city, and the port of the country, with a population of perhaps fifty thousand. We have no missionary there, the work being mostly in the hands of the natives. M. L. Stone, native ordained preacher, is pastor of our church there, the church being self-supporting, except \$2.40 a month, which ceases after this year (1899). The reported membership for 1898 is 155. There is a day school supported by the Board. At Haussa Farm, a village on the mainland a few miles from Lagos, we have a church of thirty-eight members as reported for 1898. We count this an out-station of Lagós. A young unordained man is in charge. Mr. Stone has oversight of the station. There

has been another out-station of Lagos, but little or nothing is being done. It is Debari.

At Abbeokuta, a large city of perhaps one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants, sixty miles inland from Lagos, is our next main station, in charge of Missionary W. T. Lumbley. The reported membership of the church for 1898 is twenty-two. It has always been a very hard field, but is a little more encouraging now. There is also an out-station in the city not counted among the four out-stations mentioned above.

Four days' journey northeast of Abbeokuta is Awyaw, the capital city of the Yoruba nation proper, with a population of perhaps seventy-five thousand people. Our work here, in charge of Missionary S. G. Pinnock, is only a few years old. Twenty-five members are reported for 1898. There is an out-station at a large village a short distance from the city, which is quite promising. I ought to have mentioned that there is a native young man who preaches for the Abbeokuta church when the missionary does not, and the same is true of Awyaw, and these same young men assist the missionaries in all the work.

A hard day's journey northeast of Awyaw, is Ogbomoshaw, the border city of the Yoruba country, having a population of perhaps seventy-five thousand inhabitants. Here is our oldest church, except the one at Lagos. Two years

ago a new church was organized, and is doing good work in a promising part of the city. The reported membership of the two churches for 1898 is 111. There is a day school of from thirty to forty children, and two training classes, one adult and one of boys. There are no native men employed to preach for the churches, but various members of the churches preach in the absence of the missionary, who preaches only once every other Sunday for each church. Missionary C. E. Smith is in charge. There is a native school teacher employed by the Board. Ejigbo is a large village half a day's journey from Ogbomoshaw, and here we have an out-station in charge of a young native, paid by the Board. There are three or four professed converts there now. Some of the training class are doing work in a village to the north of Ogbomoshaw also. In all our main stations we have good church houses, and in Ogbomoshaw two, and at Lagos a good school-house, and an indifferent one at Ogbomoshaw. The total membership of our churches, as reported for 1898, was 358, and scholars in school 140, and total contributions of the churches, \$654.87. There are employed by the mission or Board two ordained men and six unordained men. There are six missionaries (three men and their wives), all on the field at present, and a colored man, J. C. Dawes, is expected soon.

MANNER OF LIFE AND WORK OF MISSIONARY.

Our manner of work is to instruct the natives (workers and members) and to try to get them to do all the work possible. Also to train those whom we can get hold of especially for the work. We preach in the native tongue, though using it very imperfectly, in the churches and in the streets. We also do house-to-house visiting. It takes a great deal of time and thought to lead the native Christians aright. We also hold an annual meeting for the instruction of the native workers and to bring them into closer union with us and with each other in the work. At Ogbomoshaw the missionary has to give about three hours a day to teaching training classes. All our missionaries have comfortable houses to live in, built by the Board, and we do not and cannot live very differently from what we would at home. So far as we can we live on what the country furnishes us, but we need many things that the country does not furnish, and we get these from England. The climate as well as our missionary work not permitting us to do all our own domestic work, we have to keep servants, and each kind of work has to have its own servant. We also receive children into the mission for training, and require them to do a part of the work. I often give an hour a day to training my mission

boys to use carpenter tools, but this is limited to what work I need to have done. In teaching the natives we do not, farther than seems absolutely necessary, interfere with their native customs.

HINDRANCES TO OUR WORK.

The liquor traffic is a great hindrance in some places. It is of fearful dimensions, and natives take to it naturally. Many white men are a hindrance, at least to good morals, though I doubt if their lives actually hinder our work, except to the extent of those who are under them. I have noticed that many of our best young men become very indifferent to religion when employed by the government. Our having to live so much better than, and so very far above the natives, no doubt proves a hindrance, by creating the impression that we are immensely rich, and so ought to help them. Ill health, and consequent necessity of missionaries often going home, and thus causing a very great expense, is a great hindrance, and also by breaking into the work by long absence from the field. Polygamy, lying, and immorality are great hindrances.

ENCOURAGEMENTS.

But we are encouraged by what has been done, though so far short of what we hoped for, by the fact that God has called us to this work, and is with us, and will accomplish His will, by the many bright native Christians we

have, and by the fact that here are millions of dying men and women who need the Gospel, and it is our great privilege to give it to a portion of them.

OUR NEEDS.

We need all Christians in America to give themselves to this work, by prayer (first and greatest), by their means, and by sending us some of their brightest sons and daughters to work and to die for Africa. May God grant His blessing.

NOTES.

There is another Baptist church in Lagos having no connection with our mission. It is commonly called the Native Baptist church, but they call themselves the Ebenezer church, or St. Joseph-Street Baptist church. I think they have about 150 members, a good house of worship, and have recently started a day school, which promises well.

A railroad is being built from Lagos to the interior, right through the cities where we have work. It has now reached Abbeokuta, and considerable work is done this side of Abbeokuta. The journey can be made between Lagos and Abbeokuta in a few hours, whereas it used to take from three to eight days.

A telegraph line is in operation from Lagos to the Niger river, running through all our towns.

Ogbomoshaw, West Africa, 1899.